

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



STATE BOARD OF HEALTH,

BOSTON, JULY 1, 1874.

At a regular meeting of the State Board of Health, held this day, it was unanimously voted that the following address of the Chairman, Dr. HENRY I. BOWDITCH, announcing the death and recalling the services of the late Secretary of the Board, Dr. GEORGE DERBY, be printed in circular form for distribution.

F. W. DRAPER, M.D.

Secretary pro tempore.

GENTLEMEN OF THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH:—

A few days since, I warned you of the serious illness of our dear friend and honored Secretary, Dr. GEORGE DERBY. It is with great sorrow that I have summoned you again in consequence of his death.

Permit me to recall to your notice some of the more salient points in his history, with many of which, you, who have been associated with him in this Board, are already partially or perchance fully acquainted.

Dr. Derby was born in Salem, in 1819; he was the son of John Derby, an eminent merchant of that city.

He took his degree from the Harvard Medical School in 1843. For many years he practised very quietly in Boston, but was little known by the public, or to the profession, until the late war brought to light his latent energy, and his admirable character. During a recent conversation with him, he told me he believed that a love of, and devotion to, music took from him his reputation as a physician and surgeon. I think he judged rightly. Finally, the rebellion broke forth; the first call of President Lincoln upon the patriotism of the country found our friend prompt and determined to do his whole duty. He entered

again with praiseworthy zeal into all the work of student life. He took special lessons in practical surgery from our most eminent surgeons, and with more than youthful enthusiasm, studied out the improvements in medicine and surgery that had been brought forward during the many years since his pupilage, from 1838 to 1843. This act marked two of those traits of character which we, his associates on the Board of Health, have seen and admired so much during our intercourse with him: viz., his conscientiousness, and his thoroughness in his dealings with any question. He was unwilling to undertake the care of our patriot soldiers without fitting himself in the most perfect manner for the task. He received from Governor Andrew the commission of surgeon of the 23d Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteers. He went through the whole war without a furlough, and was always ready to sacrifice himself for the good of the soldiers. He was fearless in presence of danger; performing important operations on the field while under fire, with a perfect coolness and deliberation, when others, superior to him in authority, shrank from the ordeal to which his sense of professional duty summoned him.

Having thus served with a reputation for ability and devotion unsurpassed by any one, he left the army at the final closing of the war, a man comparatively broken down in health, and with the prospect of commencing anew his professional life. For months, by most careful regimen, and the daily use of quinine, he had fought against the insidious encroachments of malarial disease.

When the war closed the reaction took place, in a corresponding depression of his health.

The Government, fully appreciating his worth, and desirous of aiding him in his perfect recovery, appointed him to the charge of the National Soldiers' Home, at Augusta, Maine.

After several months' residence there, having partially at least regained his vigor, he resumed practice in Boston. He came back to us a man of noteworthy fame, as a patriot, as an able and full practised surgeon, and a most high-toned gentleman.

Soon after his return he published some papers relating to Hygiene, and he was called to fill the post of surgeon at the City Hospital. He also was made Professor of Hygiene at Harvard College.

During the war, he had married Miss PARSONS, a most estimable lady, a lineal descendant of the celebrated Judge Parsons, of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts. She was one of the many ladies of the first families of the State who devoted themselves to the nursing of our sick soldiery, in the hospitals of the Union. That marriage added a charm to his life it had never known before. The pride he took in instilling chivalric ideas of honor into his children was very charming to myself, when admitted occasionally into some of the closest intercourse of private friendship. He was expanding daily, and daily rising in the estimation of his peers in the profession, and with the public.

June 21, 1869, just five years ago, the Legislature passed the Act establishing the State Board of Health.

Ten years previously Dr. DERBY had edited the Report to the Legislature relating to the Births, Marriages and Deaths, in Massachusetts. In the preface to the Report, in 1867, the Secretary of State had used the following language in reference to Dr. DERBY, that "during the late war he was four years in active service, with the largest reputation as Surgeon."

His publications, as well as his acquired reputation at the State House and abroad, readily pointed him out as the person most fitted, on the score of his manliness, ability, and integrity, to be Secretary of the new Board. He, in fact, had no rival.

I need not remind you of all that he has done for us; of the great works he has inaugurated, and successfully carried forward. But none of us, I suspect, even now realize how devoted he has been. We all know how often and how perfectly we trusted him. We felt that the honor of our Board would be always cautiously and firmly sustained. We remember his genial and commanding presence; his indefatigable zeal in everything that was ordered by the Board. We were sure of him, as the most reliable person we could have. How much the present position of the Board, as a motive force in this community, depends on his really wonderful faculty of meeting and of moulding men, we shall never exactly know. For my own part, gentlemen, words would fail me to give you an idea of the debt we owe to him for the present standing of the Board. He guarded our honor with so jealous a care, that sometimes I was inclined to think him unduly cautious, and perhaps too far-reaching in his anticipations of possible evils about to fall upon the Board. These sombre anticipations, I have been of late inclined to think, were owing to ill health. They assumed, sometimes, the appearance of dire forebodings for the safety of the Board, when obliged to run the gauntlet of popular criticism. He could not feel, as I have ever felt, that certainly, in the present condition of the world, if our Board should be for any reason abolished by any legislature, its immediate successor would be compelled, by public opinion, to call another board, of similiar character, into existence. State, or preventive medicine, has taken so deep a root into the conscience of the English speaking race, that hereafter Boards of Health, or in other words, for the prevention of disease, must forever exist; and they will have more and more weight upon the policy of states and of nations, as well as upon the private habits of individuals.

And now gentlemen, what is the lesson that rises to us from the life-work of our dear friend and co-laborer in a most noble cause?

Why simply this: let us one and all go on with renewed zeal and with an untiring devotion that shall be worthy of him. Let us make his course our example in our future career. If we do this, I have no fear; for the future of any cause must be bright, provided it be carried forward intelligently and with the single endeavor to do honestly and justly the duty of the hour, as our friend DERBY always did his.

God grant his grace to each one of us, and enable all of us to feel, during our future connection with the Board, the beauty of the example left to us by the life of our dead associate!

